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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2398  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 1723  
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1849  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0447  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1126  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1483  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1905  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4333  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK  
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0976  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000038

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AF/S FOR S. HILL,  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS  
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)  
SUBJECT: NO BREAKTHROUGH FROM MBEKI VISIT

REF: A. HARARE 26

[1](#)B. PRETORIA 100

Classified By: DCM Katherine Dhanani. Reason: 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai called Ambassador in Bulawayo and met with DCM on January 18 to brief on the Mbeki visit to Zimbabwe (reftels). Tsvangirai confirmed that Mbeki had offered three options for implementing a new constitution before elections: hold a referendum on the agreed draft constitution in February and elections in March; postpone elections until after consultation and a referendum on a new constitution; or adopt an interim constitution through Parliament and hold elections in March. Mbeki met with the MDC leadership after seeing Mugabe and reported that Mugabe had rejected all three options, insisting that elections go forward in March under the existing constitution. The MDC told Mbeki that the people of Zimbabwe have no faith that their votes would be respected as things stand; a new dispensation, including effective implementation of a new constitution and recently revised legislation, is essential to holding a free and fair election. Tsvangirai said Mbeki returned to see Mugabe before going to the airport. The MDC had received no readout on that conversation, suggesting no breakthrough was achieved.

[1](#)2. (C) DCM asked Tsvangirai what comes next. Tsvangirai expressed disappointment that a "historic opportunity" had been lost. He said the two MDC factions would meet the weekend of January 19-20 to conclude an agreement on joining forces for elections. Asked whether this meant a decision had been made to contest elections in March, Tsvangirai replied with some emotion that the only "principled" decision would be to boycott. However, he said, the MDC would have to discuss the question. He was certain that there would be many (especially MPs) who had a personal interest in participating, and he was not willing to predict what the party would ultimately decide.

13. (C) Comment: Mugabe's future course is clear: Zanu-PF will continue full steam ahead toward elections in March. Mbeki and the MDC face tougher decisions. Mbeki told the Harare press corps that the facilitation has made "very good progress," but once election dates are announced (likely 45 days in advance of March 29, i.e. on or about February 13) the facilitation will be forced to admit defeat. The MDC may achieve an agreement between its two factions, but the question of a boycott threatens new discord. Most observers judge that Tsvangirai does not have enough support to pull a boycott off. He may pragmatically accept a party decision to contest, but it will be difficult to effectively lead the campaign in an election he knows ZANU-PF has already stolen.  
MCGEE